the serious health hazard being faced by people in parts of Kerala due to spraying of a pesticide Endosulphan, banned in most countries, on cashew plantations by the Plantations Corporation of Kerala, a public sector undertaking;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto, alongwith the size of the affected pupulation; and

(c) the steps taken to ban/check the use of this hazardous pesticide and the measures taken to protect the population inhabitating" cashew growing areas?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Government of Kerala have already issued orders to stop the aerial spraying of Endosulfan on cashew plantations.

(c) Endosulfan has been reviewed for its continued use or otherwise in the country twice in 1991 and 1999 by the Expert Committees. Both these Committees have recommended the continue use of Endosulfan in the country.

Further, the Government is propularising Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach which encourages adoption of improved agronomic practices like use of pest resistant/tolerant crop varieties, mechanical control, use of biological control agents *viz.* parasites and predators which cause natural suppression of pests and need based use of safer pesticides and bio-pesticides.

UNDRC assistance for natural disasters

3532. SHRI B. J. PANDA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the article captioned, "Blame it on the forces of nature" by Sunder K. Datta Ray appearing in The Business Standard, New Delhi dated the 28th January, 2001;

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that India heads the list of countries along with China, Hongkong and Philippines that are vulnerable to natural disaster;

(c) whether India has ever made a request to the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordination (UNDRC) for assistance; and

(d) if not, whether Government are thinking to make such request now looking to the present Flood Disaster in Orissa, a calamity-prone State in India?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) It appears that no issue of the Business Standard was published in New Delhi on 28th January, 2001.

(b) On account of geographical position, climate and geological setting, India is prone to various natural disasters like cyclone, flood, earthquake, drought. There is hardly a year when some part of the country or other does not face one disaster or combination of disasters.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) As per the policy of the Government of India with regard to external assistance for relief in the wake of natural disasters, no formal appeal on behalf of the Government either directly or through any other agency to attract relief is made. However, relief donated on a voluntary basis is accepted and acknowledged as a sign of international solidarity.

Projects of SFAC

3533. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the amount allocated to projects taken up by SFAC during the last three years and achievements made by it, with special reference to the NER, State-wise;

(b) whether any State level SFACs have been formed;

(c) if so, their structure and scope and the number of such State level SFACs; and

(d) the budgetary allotment to SFAC, with break-up, in regard to each State level SFAC, the amount allocated during 2000-2001, 2001-2002 and that proposed under the Tenth Five Year Plan?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI AJIT SINGH): (a) During the last three years, a grant-in-aid amounting to Rs. 7.50 crore has been released to the Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), under the Central Sector Scheme 'Setting up of Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium'. Out of the said Rs. 7.50 crore grant-in-aid released to the SFAC, Rs. 0.80 crore was earmarked for the North Eastern States of the country, including Sikkim. However, against that allocation, a grants-in-aid amounting to Rs. 4.00 crore has already been released to the 8 North Eastern States including Sikkim, during the Ninth Plan, for the creation of corpus for the respective State level